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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if large, predominantly white universities had changed their admission policies for black students since 1969, and whether the number of black freshmen had changed. One hundred and ten questionnaires were sent to such institutions throughout the U.S., 107 of which returned them. Questions were asked about (1) undergraduate enrollment, new freshmen, and the number of black freshmen newly matriculated; (2) regular admission policies for freshmen; (3) special programs in which mostly blacks are enrolled and admission criteria for these programs; and (4) special admission policies for blacks if any. The findings indicated that the median percentage of black freshmen had gone from 3 percent in 1969 to 4 percent in 1970. In addition, more schools were using recommendations, extracurricular activities, and interviews, and fewer were using standardized tests, and high school grades alone as predictors for all students, including blacks. There was almost no change in the number employing open admissions (10 percent in 1969 and 12 percent in 1970). This report also discusses findings of other research studies, and issues in predicting black student success. (AF)

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BLACK ADMISSIONS TO LARGE UNIVERSITIES: ARE THINGS CHANGING?

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Research Report # 3-71

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SUMMARY

A national survey of black admissions to large, predominantly white universities indicates that the median percent of black freshmen in these schools has gone from 3% in 1969 to 4% in 1970. Additionally, more schools are using recommendations, extracurricular activities and interviews, and less are using standardized tests and high school grades alone as predictors for all students, including blacks. There was almost no change in the number of schools employing open admissions (10% in 1969 and 12% in 1970). Results of current research, and issues in predicting black student success are discussed.

Recently the question of admission of blacks into colleges and universities has been widely discussed in magazines, journals and at professional meetings. Sedlacek and Brooks (1970) were particularly concerned with the large, primarily white institutions. While there are many kinds of institutions of higher education in the United States, 35% of the nation's undergraduates are enrolled in the 160 institutions defined by the National Center For Educational Statistics (U. S. Office of Education, 1970) as universities. Thus, changes in university enrollment of blacks can have a great impact on American higher education. Many of these institutions are actively seeking blacks and employ a variety of techniques to recruit and attract black students. But the fundamental question remains: How are universities doing? Are they enrolling more black students? What admissions standards are they using for blacks? Are they studying or modifying their admissions procedures? Sedlacek and Brooks (1970) addressed themselves to these questions for the freshman class entering in the fall of 1969. They found that very few blacks (3%) were entering the large, primarily white universities. Additionally, while many schools had established special programs for blacks, the admissions procedures used for entry into these programs and for regular black admissions remained very traditional (standardized tests, high school grades and class rank). Sedlacek and Brooks further suggested that an annual survey of admissions policies for black students might aid high school and university counselors, and admissions officers who work regularly with black students.

The purpose of this study was to survey the large, predominantly white universities again, to determine if black student admissions policies and the number of black freshmen have changed since 1969.

The Survey

The admissions offices of 110 institutions were sent a questionnaire concerning their black admissions policies. The institutions sampled were large, primarily white schools throughout the United States. Schools in the major athletic conferences and large independent institutions were included in the sample. If an individual state (including the District of Columbia) was not represented by the sampling method used, its largest state school was included. The questionnaires were mailed out in November 1970, and telephone follow-up procedures resulted in a total return of 107 questionnaires (97%). The questionnaire was nearly identical to that used in the 1969 survey. The only changes made were to clarify wording and were based on comments of 1969 respondents. Six schools from the 1969 sample were dropped from the 1970 sample, and fourteen additional schools were added to the survey. It was felt that these changes made the sample more precisely reflect the sample criteria. Of the 107 respondents of 1970, 83 were also included in the 1969 survey. There were no statistically significant differences in total enrollment, freshman enrollment, or in black enrollment (.05 level using χ^2 and t) between the 83 schools responding in both years and the remaining 24 schools. Consequently, results of all 107 respondents are reported together. Of the 107 schools, 87 (81%) were public and 20 (19%) were private.

Results

The four questionnaire items and answers are listed below. Respondents were also asked to give general comments which are reported in the discussion section.

1. *What is your approximate undergraduate enrollment? About how many new freshmen matriculated this fall? About how many of your newly matriculated freshmen are black?*

Table 1 shows the range of enrollment, total enrollment, and black enrollment by six geographical regions for schools in the sample. The regions are based on the regional accrediting associations reported in the *Higher Education Directory* of the U. S. Office of Education. The median total enrollment was 11,000, while median freshman enrollment was 2,450 and median black freshman enrollment was 77. The median percent of black freshmen was 4 percent.

These results compare with a median total enrollment of 10,800, a median freshman enrollment of 2,392, a median black freshman enrollment of 64 and a 3% median percent of black freshmen from the 1969 survey (Sedlacek and Brooks, 1970).

2. *Briefly describe your regular bases for admission of new freshmen.*

Eighty-eight of the 107 schools (82%) reported using either high school average (HSA) or high school rank (HSR) combined with the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or the American College Test (ACT), compared with 99% in 1969 (Sedlacek and Brooks, 1970).

Table 2 shows that while relatively few schools used recommendations (34%), extracurricular activities (12%) or interviews (8%), they were used considerably more than in 1969 (recommendations 13%, extracurricular activities 2%, interviews 1%). Additionally, 31 schools (29%) reported using four or more admissions criteria in 1970 compared to five schools (6%) in 1969. However, there has been almost no increase in the use of open admissions policies (10% in 1969, and 12% in 1970).

3. *Do you have special programs in which blacks (or mostly blacks) are enrolled? If yes, please briefly describe the criteria for admission to the program(s).*

Fifty-six of the 107 schools (52%) reported having special programs in which black or mostly black students were enrolled in 1970 compared to 48% in 1969 (see Table 3). Eleven of the 56 schools (20%) had special programs limited to area residents.

Thirty-seven of the 56 schools (66%) admitted freshmen to their special programs using admissions criteria that were either different, or weighted differently than those for regular freshman admissions. Additionally, 10 of the 56 schools (18%) required summer school, 6 (11%) were financial aid programs only and 1 required five years to complete. As in the 1969 survey the most commonly used admissions criteria for blacks in special programs were HSA, HSR, SAT or ACT and recommendations.

4. *Aside from special programs, are blacks admitted under the same criteria as are all regular new freshmen?*

Thirty-eight (36%) of the 107 schools used different admissions criteria for blacks in 1970 compared to 45% in 1969. Thirty-four (89%) of the 38 schools used either SAT or ACT in selection. HSA, HSR and recommendations were widely used in both 1969 and 1970 (see Table 4). The term "different criteria of admission" was generally interpreted by admissions officers as referring to different applications or cutoff points of the same variables used in regular admissions (e.g., standardized tests and high school performance). Generally, the differences were lower cutoffs or other variations. The only striking difference between special program admissions and regular admissions is in the use of personal interviews. Nineteen percent of special programs used interviews, while only 8% of the sample used interviews as a regular admissions criterion.

Table 5 shows much of the survey data broken down by type of institution (public or private). Results show that private schools tend to enroll more blacks, use different criteria to select blacks, and do more research on black admissions than do public institutions. Public schools tend to be larger and have more special programs for blacks than do the private schools. Overall, 54 (50%) of the 107 schools in the sample were doing research on black admissions in 1970 compared to 31% in 1969.

Discussion

There has been an increase in black freshman enrollment in the large, predominantly white institutions across the country. The median percent of black freshmen in these schools has increased from 3% in 1969 to 4% in 1970 (Table 1). Additionally, the increase seems to be nationwide rather than limited to only certain regions. Four of the six geographical regions showed gains while the North Central and Northwest regions remained the same. Interestingly, the increase in black freshmen occurred with virtually no increase in the size of the institutions since 1969. The 4% black freshman figure found in the current survey agrees with data provided by the American Council on Education (1970). They report that 3.6% of the freshmen (using a weighted composite based on a sample of 33 universities) enrolled in universities are black (Negro-Afro American). They also report that the percent of black freshmen in all institutions is 9.1%. However, despite these figures the black American is far from being a full participant in American higher education.

There is no question that the black American's educational opportunities, as well as attainment, have been improving. For instance, the percentage of black teenagers graduating from high school has increased from 39% in 1960 to

58% in 1969, as compared to 62% of the white teenagers in 1969 (Wright, 1971). Furthermore, approximately 10% of all high school graduates are black (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1971). The fact that 10% of all high school graduates are black, coupled with the fact that 9.1% of all freshmen in higher education are black, is, on the surface, very encouraging. However, the American Council on Education reports that 14.2% of 2-year college freshmen are black, 8.1% of all 4-year college freshmen are black, and that only 3.6% of university freshmen are black. Further, when the predominantly black 4-year colleges are not included, the percentage of blacks at 4-year colleges is reduced to only 2.6%. Thus, the black American is proportionately underrepresented in all institutions of higher education except for 2-year colleges and predominantly black 4-year colleges.

Perhaps the most interesting finding in this study concerns the predictors being employed for <u>all</u> freshman admissions. Not only are more schools using recommendations, extracurricular activities and interviews, but less are using standardized tests and HSA or HSR alone as predictors for all students, including blacks (Table 2). There is also a tendency for schools to use more predictors in 1970 than in 1969. Whether this increase in number of predictors has been stimulated by pressure from blacks and other minorities, from students and faculty in general, from a decreasing faith in tests, or from other variables is not known. Although more schools report doing research on black admissions, the predictors used for blacks generally remain the same as those for whites, except that in many cases different cutoffs or applications of the predictors are applied to blacks.

Another relevant finding concerns the fact that a number of schools expressed concern over a survey solely on black admissions. These schools, generally from the Southwestern and Northwestern parts of the country, are in

areas where the black population is relatively low, but the population of other minorities, particularly American Indians and Mexican-Americans, is relatively high. The concern of these schools centers around their commitment to make greater efforts in educating minority group members in their immediate communities. The writers see this as an encouraging sign that American higher education is recognizing that all minority group members have been deprived of higher educational opportunities and that strides are underway to close this gap.

The entire area of minority education raises the large area of controversy and concern facing higher education that can be stated as: Are there predictors that uniquely reflect the backgrounds and abilities of blacks, as well as other minorities? If the same predictors used for whites are used for minority group members, with the sole difference being the employment of "lower standards," is higher education acting in a racist and discriminatory manner by regarding blacks and other minority group members as inferior before they are ever enrolled? The Cultural Study Center at the University of Maryland has begun a research program designed to answer these questions, with its primary focus upon black students. The first phases of the research program involved an examination of the admissions practices currently being employed by the University, followed by a search for predictors that may already be available, although not necessarily currently employed. The third and most difficult phase involves applying what has been learned in the early phases and working with a broad cross-section of blacks, both on campus and in their communities, in an attempt to develop uniquely black predictors. Results from the first two phases indicate that a combination of SAT, HSA, and HSR predicts freshman grades as well for blacks as it does whites (Pfeifer and Sedlacek, 1970a), although there were large differences in the optimal weights assigned to each

variable. For instance HSA was found to be a poor predictor of freshman grades for black males. Thomas and Stanley (1969) report similar findings. Pfeifer and Sedlacek also cite several measurement and sampling bias arguments that indicate problems in using the same predictors for blacks and whites. Also Pfeifer and Sedlacek (1970b) found that several scales of the California Psychological Inventory and the Holland Vocational Preference Inventory operate quite differently in predicting the grades of blacks, compared to the way in which they predict the grades of whites, and may form a useful measure of self-concept. They also found that the blacks who got the highest grades felt the school and the faculty cared about solving social problems. Additionally, DiCesare, Sedlacek and Brooks (1970) found that the blacks who stayed at the University, as opposed to those who dropped out, were more realistic and saw more racism at the school, but had stronger self-concepts that may have been beneficial in handling their situation.

Although the results of this survey indicate that more schools are employing more predictors than simply high school performance and standardized tests, Stanley (1970), in summarizing the work on predicting the success of "disadvantaged" students, has concluded that admission to selective colleges and universities should be based substantially upon test scores and high school grades, irrespective of whether the applicant is from a minority racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group. Stanley feels pessimistic about the possibilities of remediation for disadvantaged students and states (p. 642): "An admissions officer ignores test scores at his institution's peril." While there have been an increasing number of studies showing the same predictors work as well for blacks or whites (see Thomas and Stanley 1969, Pfeifer and Sedlacek 1970a), there also exist studies with contrary or unexplained findings (e.g., Clark and Plotkin 1964, Green and Farquhar 1965, Cleary 1968, Pfeifer and Sedlacek 1970a, 1970b).

The question of open admissions is often raised as a possible method to increase black enrollment and has generated probably the most heated debates of any of the admissions methods. The Vice President of the United States found it necessary to remark that "open admissions" and "lessening admission requirements" would downgrade higher education (Agnew, 1970). Data from the current survey indicate that there has been almost no change in open admissions policies from 1969 to 1970, although generally more predictors are being employed in selecting both black and white students. The response of educators to Agnew's remarks was generally very negative (see Summer 1970 issue of *College Board Review*). Perhaps this response and data from this study indicate that higher education has not accepted the expressed, but as yet unproven, concern that a "loosening" of admissions criteria will result in a "downgrading" of higher education. While the writers do not advocate downgrading higher education, they feel that until substantial evidence exists that such loosening does indeed downgrade higher education, colleges and universities should continue moving toward offering blacks, as well as other minority groups, an opportunity to participate in the fruits of a college education.

Although there are more blacks enrolled at the large, primarily white universities, the increase is minimal, and furthermore black Americans are still underrepresented in both universities and primarily white 4-year colleges. It is felt that much greater efforts must be made to reduce these disparities. However, the burden of proof lies primarily with those contending that current admissions standards are unfair to blacks. Intelligent, creative, and innovative research, perhaps the best ever done by social scientists, is crucially needed. Allowing chance and confusion to make such an important decision is the least acceptable of all possible alternatives.

TABLE 1

Range and Frequency of Enrollments for 107 Schools
by Geographical Location (Question 1)

Schools by Region	N	Range of Total Enroll.	Median Total Enroll.	Median Fresh. Enroll.	Median Black Fresh. Enroll.	Median * Percent of Black Fresh. Enroll.
North Central	37	4,000-50,000	14,000	3,000	100	3
Southern	26	2,100-32,000	11,065	2,345	68	3
Middle States	21	2,000-36,701	8,000	1,855	125	8
Northwest	12	2,200-25,118	7,387	2,377	26	1
New England	6	5,600-15,262	8,050	2,112	35	2
Western	5	6,300-18,000	18,000	2,500	175	8
Totals	107	2,000-50,000	11,000	2,450	77	4

* All percents rounded off to whole numbers.

TABLE 2

Frequencies of Admissions Criteria Used by 107 Schools (Question 2)

Schools by Region	N	Admissions Criteria: Open Admissions	High School GPA	High School Rank	SAT	ACT	CEEB Ach. Tests	State/ Local Tests	Extra-curr. Activities	Recommendations	Interview	Predicted GPA	Preference to Local Res.	Preference to Alumni-Family
North Central	37	6 *	19	31	20	19	2		3	10	2			1
Southern	26	2	13	20	22	9	3	3	2	9	3	3	2	3
Middle States	21	2	17	18	16	1	3	4	7	12	3	3	1	
Northwest	12	3	8	4	3	4				1	1	2		1
New England	6		1	6	6					2				
Western	5		5	2	5	1	3		1	2				
Totals	107	13	63	81	72	34	11	7	13	36	9	8	3	5

* In addition to these 6 schools, 1 school reports admitting black students from <u>within the state</u> on an Open Admissions Basis.

TABLE 3

Frequencies of Admissions Criteria Used by 107 Schools
To Select Black Students to Special Programs (Question 3)

Schools by Region	N	Admissions Criteria: Spec. Programs N	Spec. Prog. Local Res. Only	High School GPA	High School Rank	SAT	ACT	CEEB Ach. Tests	State or Local Tests	Extra-curr. Activities	Recommendations	Interview	Predicted GPA	Preference to Local Res.	Preference to Alumni-Family
North Central	37	17	2	6	7	6	1			2	7	3			
Southern	26	10	1	3	2	3	1	1		1	3		1		
Middle States	21	18	4	11	11	8			1	3	7	7	1		
Northwest	12	5	2	4		1	1		1	1	2				
New England	6	4	2		2	2					2	1			
Western	5	2		2		2		2							
Totals	107	56	11	26	22	22	3	3	2	7	21	11	2		

TABLE 4

Frequencies of Different Bases of Regular Admissions Criteria
Used by 107 Schools to Select Black Students (Question 4)

Schools by Region	N	Admissions Criteria: Diff. Bases N	High School GPA	High School Rank	SAT	ACT	CEEB Ach. Tests	State or Local Tests	Extra-curr. Activi-ties	Recom-menda tions	Inter-view	Pre-dicted GPA	Pre-ference to Local Res.	Pre-ference to Alumni-Family
North Central	37	11	4	10	7	5	2		3	6	1			1
Southern	26	11	4	10	11	2	3	2	2	7	1	1		1
Middle States	21	7	4	6	7		1		2	4	2			
Northwest	12	2	1	1		1						1		
New England	6	5	1	5	5					2				
Western	5	2	2	1	1	1			1	1				
Totals	107	38	16	33	31	9	6	2	8	20	4	2		2

TABLE 5

Survey Data by Type of Institution

	N	Range of Total Enroll.	Median Total Enroll.	Median Fresh. Enroll.	Median Black Fresh. Enroll.	Median Percent of Black Fresh. Enroll.	Percent with Spec. Progs.	Percent Using Different Criteria for Blacks	Percent with Some Office Doing Research on Black Admissions
Private	20	2,000-11,896	5,300	1,311	58	6	45	75	75
Public	87	2,200-50,000	12,504	2,800	91	4	54	26	45

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